

# Working With the Media to Disseminate Your Message

## Five Steps to Successful Media Relations

The following information is designed to help you work successfully with the news media. Many of the same techniques and skills can be utilized to help you reach community groups and other audiences you wish to reach with various traffic safety messages.

1. Identify key messages (What do you want people to know? To do?).
2. Identify target audiences.
3. Simplify the message.
4. Select several vehicles to carry the message (Internet, print, radio, TV).
5. Convey the message with frequency.

**Choosing the Media Medium.** In the next section of this resource guide, you will find descriptions and samples of a variety of media relations tools. While all of these tools serve a specific purpose in communicating information to all aspects of the media (Internet, newspapers, radio and TV), there are times when one tool might better meet the needs of the media than others. For example, it would not be practical to hold a news conference to promote an event or activity that did not provide a visual appeal or include a strong media hook (e.g., new information, release of a study or plan, etc). Likewise, a story with a strong visual component would not be best served by utilizing radio only. Often, a combination of media “mediums” is the best way to convey your message to the broadest audience. It’s also possible to format your key messages to meet the needs of all mediums. Remember, people can pick up the daily newspaper, listen to drive time radio, catch the late night news on TV or use the Internet as their primary information source.

## Veni, Vidi, Video

*“I came, I saw, I appeared on television.”*

### Challenge

Use the right medium to reach the right audiences. Discern the best way to reach your target audience with a message that will motivate them to respond. So you’ve decided to tell your story through the news media. Start by answering these questions:

1. Is the “story” newsworthy? Think of what the public really “needs” to know and what they “want” to know. It’s not about what *you* want to tell them, but what *they* need to hear.
2. Why does it matter to the readers, viewers, listeners?
3. What’s the conflict? The pivotal point of the story (angle/hook)?
4. What is the most effective medium for the story?
  - TV needs visuals — spokesperson to make the point in 8 seconds and interesting things to see.
  - Radio needs sound — good interview subjects that are brief and to the point
  - Print media goes into more depth — need good resources for credible information
5. What else is happening regionally, statewide or nationally that you can tie your story to?
  - Consider timing, other issues that will make your story relevant

6. What else is happening that could interfere with getting your message out?

### Establishing a good working relationship with the media

**Do your homework so you know whom to talk to.**

- Search online to determine the correct contact for each media outlet.
- Make some phone calls. Find out the name of the law enforcement, transportation, health or lifestyles writer or city editor at the local newspaper. Since staffing assignments often change, make sure to verify that you're directing media materials to the correct person.
- Discover who the assignment editors are at the TV stations and the news directors at local radio stations. These are the people who make decisions as to which stories will run.
- Public service directors can also be helpful, as they usually coordinate any community talk shows and determine which public service announcements receive airtime on TV or radio stations.

**Spend some time educating the media.** Let the reporter know what is going on in the traffic safety arena, including any trends within your region. Provide the reporter with background information on traffic safety issues in your community and share local and statewide statistics to drive your point home.

**Position yourself as a resource.** Being knowledgeable, professional and helpful is the best way to maintain a good relationship with a reporter. Anticipate and know how to get the information reporters will be asking for. Be prepared to localize national or statewide statistics with local facts or anecdotes. And, always get back to a reporter in a timely fashion. Return phone calls immediately, if possible.

**Know the difference between "hard" and "soft" news.**

"Hard" news is usually information that is previously unknown, a noteworthy event, a controversy, the release of a study, etc. "Soft" news or "human interest" stories involve individuals, organizations or families involved in something that may be of interest to the community. "Soft" news stories are generally not attached to a specific timeframe or deadline in the way that "hard" news operates.

**How to make that first call.** Before you call, make sure you can present your story idea clearly and succinctly. Develop an outline to help with your pitch. When you get the assignment editor or reporter on the phone, introduce yourself and your organization and your concern about the traffic safety issues in your area. Before discussing the idea, ask the reporter if he/she has time to talk. If the reporter is busy, make arrangements to call back another time.